DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 389 355 JC 950 572

AUTHOR	Matzelle, Raymond; And Others
TITLE	A Study of the Term and Semester Calendars in a Two Year Community College.
INSTITUTION	Reading Area Community Coll., Pa.
PUB DATE	Dec 95
NOTE	31p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Community Colleges; Educational Change; *Educational Planning; Educational Strategies; *Employee Attitudes; *Organizational Change; *Quarter System; *School Schedules; School Surveys; *Semester System; Student Attitudes; Student Personnel Services; Teacher Attitudes; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS	*Reading Area Community College PA

ABSTRACT

In an effort to determine the most effective school calendar system, a task force was formed at Pennsylvania's Reading Area Community College to examine the advantages and disadvantages of converting from the college's current term calendar to a semester system. The task force examined the experiences of 11 other institutions that had undergone similar calendar changes. Three subcommittees were also formed to examine possible effects on campus services. The first subcommittee reviewed issues related to student services, conducting surveys of Student Services staff, transfer students, and 234 current students. These surveys revealed that staff responses to 86% of the survey questions indicated a preference for a semester calendar, while student preferences were split. The second committee examined academic issues, reviewing effects on such student-centered issues as curricula, basic skills development, course transfer, and student course load; such faculty-centered issues as teaching load and the use of adjunct faculty; and such college-wide issues as library use, scheduling, pre-registration, and educational quality. The results of this analysis indicated that a semester system would prove beneficial. The final committee considered financial issues pertaining to enrollment; staffing and non-employee expenses; state, federal, and local funding; continuing education; and conversion costs, finding that conversion would be financially feasible. Appendixes provide the student, employee, and faculty surveys; a term versus semester system student credits estimate; and faculty survey responses. (TGI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 389 355

A STUDY OF THE TERM AND SEMESTER CALENDARS IN A TWO YEAR COMMUNITY COLLEGE

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
R. Matzelle
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Raymond Matzelle, Ed.D.
Gael Grossman
Michele Lawlor
Benjamin Rosenberger
Lou Ann Smacchi, Ph.D.
Mark Orr

December, 1995

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

JC 950 572

Contents

Introduction / 1

Student Services Issues / 6

Academic Issues / 10

Financial Issues / 13

Conclusions & Recommendations / 16

References / 18

Figure 1 / 14

Appendix A: Student Survey / 19

Appendix B: Employee Survey / 22

Appendix C: Faculty Survey / 24

Appendix D: Student Credits Estimate / 26

Appendix E: Term Versus Semester System Student Credits Estimate / 27

Appendix F: Employee Survey - Faculty Only / 28

Introduction

The Term Versus Semester Task Force was appointed by the College Council to investigate two different calender systems. The charge to the committee was: To examine the advantages and disadvantages of the Term and Semester systems at Reading Area Community College and recommend one system on the basis of the committee's deliberations.

The committee utilized three operating subcommittees: the Student Services Subcommittee chaired by Dr. LouAnn Smacchi, the Financial Affairs Subcommittee chaired by Mr. Ben Rosenberger, and the Academic Issues Subcommittee chaired jointly by Ms. Gael Grossman and Ms. Michele Lawlor.

The responsibilities of these committees are outlined in Table 1 below. In all areas of responsibility, committees were asked to place a high emphasis on quality in all areas of teaching, learning, and support services.

Table 1
Division of Research by Subcommittee

Subcommittee		
Student Services	Academic Issues	Financial Issues
Counseling	Curricula	Bookstore
Records/I R	Pre-Registration	ELC
Financial Aid	Basic Skills Dev.	Cafeteria
Tutoring	Library	Headcount/FTEs
Advisement	Testing Center	Cost of Conversion
Job Placement	Act of Transfer	Operational Cost
Admissions	Course Transfer	Staffing (more
Career Develop.	Teaching Load	or fewer)
SGA	Student Load	Nonemploy Exp.
Athletics/Activit.	Adjuncts	S,L,F Funding
Orientation	Scheduling	Cashier's Office

Calendar System Research

One of the first activities of this study was to consult the literature regarding previous institutions that have undergone similar calendar changes. A second source of information was a nation-wide request for information using the Internet. If any institutions were reported as having recently converted from a quarter or term to a semester system, these institutions were contacted by telephone to learn more about their experiences.

Perhaps because the ten week "term" is such an unusual system, little external research was obtained for changes from a term to a semester system. For example, the only two colleges or universities which could be identified as having recently changed from a "term" system to a semester system were The Pennsylvania State University and Western Iowa Technical Community College.

The Pennsylvania State University

When Penn State converted from a term to a semester system, no change in enrollment or full-time equivalents was noted although part-time enrollments decreased. According to a former Vice-President of Academic Affairs at the Berks Campus of Penn State, the change from a term to a semester system, occurred for primarily two reasons (S. Zervanos, personal communication, March 1, 1994). First, Penn State's schedule did not match with most colleges and universities and this hindered both transfers into and out of the university. Second, because the spring term ended in June, graduates were not able to get into the job market as easily as those students who attended colleges or universities who were on semester systems.

Western Iowa Technical Community College

One community college, Western Iowa Technical Community College, converted from an 11 week term system to a semester system in the Fall 1993 (K. Brailer, personal communication, March 1, 1994). Iowa Technical used this calendar conversion as an opportunity to increase the marketability of their courses and convert to a competency- system. At the same time, there was a slight loss in part-time headcount but an overall growth of 6% in student headcount - the same increase as in the previous year. Iowa Technical's formula for continued growth was remembering to aggressively market their programs as they had done in the past. When colleges which are undergoing a change of calendars forget to continue to advertise, recruit, and market their programs and services, enrollment declines tend to occur.

Conversions from Quarters to Semesters

Despite the shortage of colleges who have converted from"terms" to semester systems, several institutions have undergone a conversion from quarters to semester systems. Because of the similarity between term and quarter systems, several of these colleges were examined for their impact on enrollment and student retention.

Florida and Iowa Study

A study of 10 universities in two states (Florida and Iowa) was completed to determine the impact of a change from a quarter to a semester calendar on enrollment patterns and instructional outcomes (Coleman, Bolte, &Franklin, 1984). There was no significant decrease in average student credit hour load for freshmen and sophomore students; for junior/senior students, however, there was a significant decrease of approximately 1.15 credit hours.

An increase in the percentage of "W" grades awarded was also observed after institutions changed to the semester calendar system. From this the authors conclude that "the course completion rate decreases under a new semester system."

Virginia Community College System

All 23 colleges of the Virginia Community College System converted from quarters to semesters starting with the 1988-1989 school year (Puyear, 1989). The study indicated that the system-wide Fall headcount in 1988/89 was smaller than in the previous quarter; 14 colleges decreased in headcount while 9 increased. Full-time students continued to increase, but part-time students decreased significantly. Three possible explanations for this decrease in part-time students were discussed. First, the change from starting in late September to late August may have caught some part-timers by surprise. Second, longer terms may have frightened some potential part-time students. Third, college staff may not have reached out to prospective students as effectively because of all the conversion tasks that needed to be completed.

Despite the decrease in part-time students, the study found that annual FTEs continued to increase at the same rate as in the two years previous to the change in calendar systems. Twenty-one (21) colleges experienced an increase while two(2) colleges decreased in FTEs. How could annual FTEs increase while Fall Term headcount decreased? According to the author, the reason for the increase in annual FTEs was that the retention of full-time degree seeking students improved significantly.

College of the Redwoods

A study was conducted to determine if the College of the Redwoods (C/R) should convert from a quarter system to a semester system (College of the Redwoods, 1976). C/R voted unanimously to stay on the quarter system. The decision was based primarily upon:

1. The overwhelming student support for the quarter calendar - 79%.
2. The general faculty support for the quarter calendar - 58.79%. Faculty members of only one division supported the semester calendar and they, by only one person.
3. The flexibility and opportunity to offer a wide range of classes which the quarter calendar provides.
4. The indication that 20% of students drop out for a quarter due to work commitments. The quarter keeps them out a shorter period of time and better fits the seasonal employment patterns of the district.
5. The literature search which indicated the general support for the quarter system (although no actual sources were cited in the report).

Miami of Ohio

Miami University of Ohio converted from a quarter system to an early semester system in 1976. The main reason which was given for the conversion was academic; for example, the semester system allowed enough time for large student projects. A secondary reason for the change was financial -fewer forms, less postage etc.). Although satellite campuses experienced a brief decrease in enrollment, there was no change in enrollments at the main campus of Miami. According to the Registrar at Miami University, the change to a semester system was a good

decision from both an administrative and academic perspective (K. Bogard, personal communication, February 21, 1995).

Arapahoe Community College

Arapahoe Community College responded over the Internet to a request for information about calendar changes from quarters or terms to semesters. Arapahoe converted from a quarter to a semester system in 1984 and experienced an enrollment decline, at first, followed by an enrollment gain. Peggy Cole of Arapahoe was uncertain as to whether the enrollment gain was due to the change in calendars or general "market-place factors" (personal communication, March 1, 1995).

Ms. Cole felt that it was generally beneficial to have students longer because "on the quarter system, one hardly gets students up and running before it's time to stop. On the other hand, if students falter, they have more opportunities during the year to pull themselves together."

Metropolitan Community College

In February, 1995, Metropolitan Community College in Omaha, Nebraska was in the decision making stage of a quarter versus semester study. College officials indicated that if the switch to a semester system does not affect funding, the college will change to a semester system (R. Schmaitzel, February 23, 1995). The only department opposing the proposed calendar change was the Business/Industry department which values the flexibility offered by the quarter system.

Metropolitan Community College (MCC) cited three reasons for their proposed change. First, there are fewer interruptions. Second, registration and advisement activities could be reduced from three times to two times per year. Third, students would have more access to counseling services in a semester system. Finally, the Registrar from MCC warned that enrollment may go down at first but would surely return to normal later.

Cleveland State University

Like MCC, Cleveland State University (CSU) is currently considering a change from a quarter system to a semester system. The Registrar from Cleveland State also proposed three reasons for a probable change to a semester system. The first reason is that most of Ohio is converting or has converted to a semester system due to a state mandate for all universities affiliated with CSU.

A second reason for a change to a semester system is that the number of registrations will be reduced and advisement will be simplified. Finally, CSU's law school is already on a semester system and it did not suffer any enrollment declines after the change from a quarter system. Always an important factor in a calendar decision, the faculty at CSU favor the change to a semester system as long as their teaching loads remain the same (K. Artim, personal communication, February 23, 1995).

Lansing Community College

According to Dan Holt (personal communication, March 2,1995), Lansing Community College switched from a "term to a semester" system and this resulted in a drop in enrollment. He added

that it was, however, quite possible that other factors were also involved in the enrollment decline such as the low unemployment rate. Before county sponsorship at Reading Area Community College, unemployment rates were found to be significantly related to enrollments.

Northeastern University

In Boston, Northeastern University concluded in their study that the university should change from a quarter to a semester system. The reasons for the recommendation were both academic and administrative. Regarding the former, the university felt that a ten week term was insufficient for detailed student papers and projects. Administratively, the constant starting and stopping of ten week terms was inconvenient and disruptive (W. Faiffler, personal communication, February 21, 1995).

Though the recommendation was to change to a semester system, the university decided to delay a change of calendar. The reasons for this delay were twofold. First, the university was in the midst of a ten year accreditation study and they could not afford the time needed to accomplish a calendar change. Second, the university's budget needed to be reduced and it was felt that the costs to convert to a semester system were not a high priority. Northeastern will revisit the issue in 4 years.

Student Services Issues

The Student Services Subcommittee was charged with researching the impact of a term/semester calendar on the Student Services Area of the college. In addition to obtaining feedback from the Student Services Staff, the subcommittee also solicited information from students.

Student Services

In order to determine the benefits and detriments of our current calendar and the projected impact of a semester calendar, all areas of Student Services were asked to complete an assessment of their areas. The following information highlights these assessments.

I. Advantages of the current term calendar which could be disadvantageous in a semester calendar.

- Course Sequencing: Especially in the area of developmental courses - our current developmental formatting would need to be researched and revised under another calendar.

- Ten week commitment: It may be easier for some of our students to make a 10 week rather than a 15 week commitment.

- Student Budgets: Some students may find payment easier on a 3-term basis.

II. Advantages of a semester calendar which could be disadvantageous in a term calendar.

- Job Market: Our graduates enter the work force and the summer job market 1 month later than do students from all other area colleges.

- Planning Time: A semester calendar would allow time to plan and prepare for a new semester to start. This would impact on the accuracy and timeliness of probation, class rosters, student schedule adjustments, identification of dismissed students, grade postings, honor lists, financial aid assessments, etc. Our current system forces at-risk students to begin their term up to one week late and sometimes dismisses students after a new term has begun. This problem is especially critical between winter and spring terms.

- Staff Processing Time: A semester calendar would remove an entire cycle of processing (i.e., advisement, registration, financial aid posting, billing, grade posting, schedule preparation, book orders, etc.). It is believed by the majority of student services staff that this would reduce errors, reduce stress, and result in a more efficient organization that would provide more staff time to meet the needs of a nontraditional student population.

- Retention: Semester calendar offers one less exit point. Also, 15 weeks allows for more student intervention, academic support (tutoring and counseling), and recovery time following a bad grade or a personal crisis. Posting of the "U" list on our current system allows little or no time for intervention strategies to impact retention. Developmental courses over a 15 week period may give students a better opportunity to process or master information.

- Similar to Other Colleges: Being similar to other colleges would be beneficial for transfer students, athletic competition, and other instances where we have to interface with colleagues. Also, external requests, reports, and all financial aid documentation and disbursements must be continually converted from one system to the other. RACC also cannot benefit from many existing software packages to solve operations problems since the market is only available for semester calendars.

Only the highlights of this research have been presented. A more comprehensive presentation of this material can be made available upon request.

Student Surveys

Two student surveys were conducted over the 1994-95 Academic year. One was directed to transfer students and the other randomly polled our current student population.

Transfer Survey

The transfer survey was designed to solicit information from students who had had a minimum of 18 earned credits from both a term and semester calendar. This survey included students who transferred from RACC and students who transferred into RACC. "Outgoing Students" (students who received an Associate Degree at RACC and went on to pursue their Bachelor's Degree) favored the Semester System. More specifically, 54% of responses to the survey were in favor of the semester system, 22.1% favored the term system, and 23.6% of the responses showed no preference. Of the "Incoming Students" (students transferring to RACC after having completed a minimum of 18 credits) 44.1% of responses to the survey favored the Term System, 39.5% favored the semester system, and 16.4% showed no preference. The survey total of these groups resulted in 45.8% of responses favoring the Semester System, 34.8% favoring the Term System, and 19.4% showing no preference.

Several questions within the survey resulted in a strong preference by students. 64% of all students surveyed reported a preference for an Academic year beginning in late August and ending in mid May while only 22% reported a preference for an Academic year beginning in late September and ending in mid June. 53% of students responded that the Semester System gave more opportunities for summer employment while 20% of students identified better opportunities within the Term System. Favoring the Term System, 56% of students indicated that the Term System would offer the ability to complete more courses over the Academic year.

Current Student Survey

This survey was administered to 17 classes (N=234)[1] to obtain a representative cross section of RACC's student population. Also, individual students participated in the study through the Student Government Association. A copy of this survey can be found in Appendix A.

It is important to note that some of the inconsistent responses in the student survey suggest that the majority of the students polled were not fully aware of the differences between the two calendar systems. Even though a somewhat descriptive coversheet accompanied the survey, only 30% of the students surveyed said they had had any experience at all with a semester calendar.

This survey showed a split in opinion between day and evening students. Day students responded to most of the questions in favor of the semester calendar, while evening students responded to most of the questions in favor of the term calendar.

Although day students showed a preference for the semester calendar, there were some variances within the group. A stronger preference was shown by full-time rather than part time students, transferring rather than non-transferring students, sophomore rather than freshmen students, and day students who had experienced a Saturday Semester class at RACC.

Of the day students surveyed, the following composite exists: 72% indicated an intent to transfer, 72% are full-time, 38% are sophomores, and 17% are currently taking or have taken a Saturday class.

The survey indicates that day students' strongest preferences within a semester calendar are: the start and end of the academic year, the opportunities for summer employment, and the additional time available in the semester to obtain tutoring, to study, to do research, to cover course material, and to rebound after a bad test or missed classes. The least favorable response to the Semester System was that 52% of day students indicated that a term calendar would allow them to complete more courses over the Academic year.

Evening students showed a preference for the term calendar. With this group, full-time students showed a stronger preference for the Term System than did part-time students; transfer students showed a stronger preference than did non-transfer students; and students who had not experienced a Saturday Semester class more strongly favored the Term System than those who had. Of the evening students surveyed, the following composite exists: 24% are full time students, 68% indicate an intent to transfer, 34% are sophomores, and 32% have had or are currently taking a Saturday Semester class.

---

[1]A sample of 234 is accurate to measure RACC's population. According to Fowler (1988), "A sample of 150 people will describe a population of 15,000 or 15 million with virtually the same degree of accuracy."

The survey indicates that evening students' strongest preferences within a term calendar are: an 8-12 credit course load, the class meeting schedules, learning the course work in a 10-week period, the impact on personal life, and the ability to complete more courses over the academic year. The least favorable response to the Term System was that a semester calendar may offer more opportunities for summer employment.

Employee Survey (Student Services)

Based on the results of the Employee Survey (see Appendix B), the Student Services Staff strongly favored a semester calendar, 86% of the questions asked showed preference for the semester calendar. Questions favoring a semester calendar included benefits to students, enrollment, retention, and staff positions. Favoring a Term Calendar, 43% of staff surveyed indicated that the student may be able to complete more courses in an academic year on a Term Calendar.

When asked how long a conversion should take, should the College decide to switch, 43% of Student Services Staff recommended one year, and 43% recommended two years.

Academic Issues

This subcommittee had twelve main issues to consider during the examination of the two different calendar systems. These issues ranged from student-centered (curricular, course load, transfer, and basic skills development), faculty-centered (teaching load and adjuncts), to College-wide (library, testing center, scheduling, pre-registration, and quality). While each of these issues is important, seen together they present an overall picture.

Student-Centered

Curricula

After careful consideration of the various curricula as they currently exist at Reading Area Community College, the subcommittee decided that substantial revision of the curricula would be needed in some programs of study in order for full time students to be able to complete a degree in two years. Some sequential course offerings would need to be examined and, perhaps, changed. Other degree programs would be relatively unaffected.

Basic Skills Development

Opinion and research were divided on this question. There are some courses that would benefit from the collapsed time of the term, others that would benefit from the longer time between class periods that would occur under the semester system. One concern that the institution as an entirety needs to address is whether or not a student taking basic skills courses would be able to be a full time student.

Act of Transferring and Course Transfer

Transferring to other schools would benefit from a semester configuration as the time tables of the schools would match more closely, enabling transfers at other times other then September without appreciatable loss of time. Currently, certain courses (mainly the lab sciences) do not always transfer because schools functioning under a semester configuration do not feel enough time is spent in the lab class for a one-to-one transfer of credits to occur. This was one of the major reasons that brought about the change from a quarter to a semester system for Lansing Community College.

Student Course Load

Obviously the amount of credits a student would need in order to be considered full time under the semester system is more then the number of credits to be a full time student under the term system. On the student survey, 57% of the students stated that they would prefer the course load under the term system as compared to 25% who would prefer the course load required under the semester system. The full time faculty from the Term versus Semester Employee survey had 48% of the faculty stating that they felt students would do better as full time students under the term system and 24% would benefit as full time students under the semester system. Another 24% of the faculty felt that there would be no real difference.

Faculty-centered

Faculty Teaching Load

Under the current system, faculty teach 30 credits over 3 terms. This study was made with the assumption that faculty would continue to teach 30 credits over the academic year. Faculty has expressed concern over teaching around 15 credits a semester, however that is a contractual matter, which different schools have addressed in various ways (two semesters of 15 credits each, 2 semesters of 12 credits each, or the faculty option to teach 1 or 2 classes the summer before and thus teach 2 main semesters with 12 credit loads).

Adjuncts

While the differences in hiring adjuncts for two semesters as opposed to three terms was discussed, it was not believed that the ability to hire qualified adjuncts would be affected. Obviously, changes would need to be made in how many courses an adjunct could teach each semester.

College-wide

Library

Under a semester system students would have more opportunity to request materials from other libraries. The Employee survey indicates that 71% of the respondents believe that students' library research times would benefit under a semester configuration.

Testing Center

There would be no applicable changes between the functioning of the Testing Center either under a Term or Semester configuration.

Scheduling

Concerns were raised over the physical ability of the school to have as many classes as needed running concurrently if a change to a semester structure was executed. This would be felt most acutely in classes that utilized laboratory facilities.

Pre-registration

Pre-registration would be simplified under a semester system as it would occur only twice a year (excluding various summer sessions).

Quality

An important point to remember when considering both the semester and term system is that quality is not an issue that has one clear answer. There are proponents on either side, and research to support both sides. Due to the extra number of days between classes that a semester has, it is possible to believe that a student would have more time to prepare for classes -- however, students would also be taking more classes (if they wished to have the same number of credits earned at the end of the year). A member of the transition committee at Lansing Community College stated that the reason the school changed was for "consistency with the other schools -- ease of transfers and distance learning opportunities, not because we were

convinced that it was best way to go." The same committee member also said that if they had the opportunity to choose again, the school would go the same way.

Summary

Although there are concerns about enabling a Term to Semester transition, most of the data we have gathered show that this would be a preferred change. Even the faculty who state on the surveys that their personal preference is for the Term system concur that students would either benefit or not be negatively affected by a Semester configuration (see Appendix F). The vast majority of faculty feel that a change to a Semester system should take place over a period of at least one year and no more then two years.

Financial Issues

The Financial Affairs subcommittee was chartered to review the financial aspects of a term system versus a semester calendar. As stated in Table 1, we were given a very specific area of responsibility. To explain how we accomplished this task, each area is listed below.

Enrollment

With much of our funding being directly related to enrollment, there was a great deal of effort involved with estimating the effect on enrollment. What would be the effect on enrollment when changing to a semester calendar? To answer this question, we reviewed some published research studies and conducted some of our own institutional research. All research studies which we reviewed were discussed earlier.

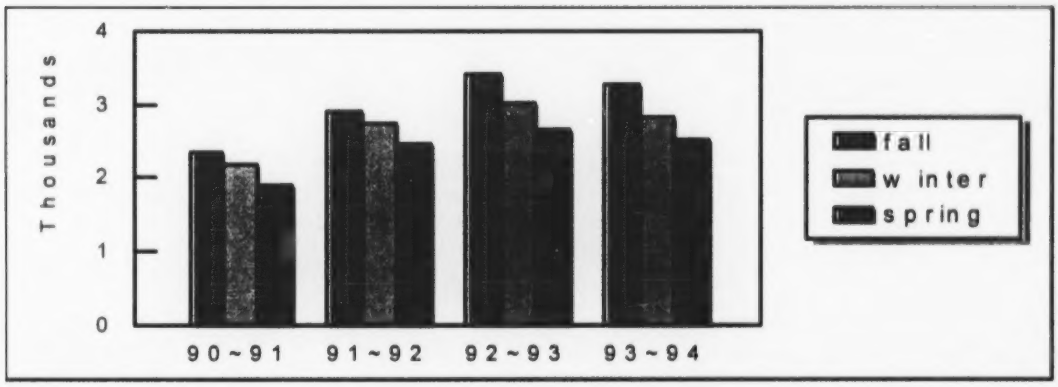
The consensus from most research studies indicated that Fall enrollment dropped but overall annual full-time equivalent enrollment increased during the year of transformation. When we discovered this trend, we decided to do some institutional research to see if this would hold true for Reading Area Community College.

The first area of research was geared toward determining the impact of starting earlier under a semester system. How many students could not have registered if we had started a month earlier? To determine this, we compiled a list of all students who registered after August 29, 1994 for the 1994-95 Fall Term. There were 785 students who enrolled after the start of a traditional semester system. We then randomly called 300 of those students to determine how many would not have been able to attend. The results indicated that 4% of the students questioned could not have enrolled under the earlier starting date. Also, 2% stated that they were unsure. Thus, 94% said they could and would have enrolled sooner if necessary. This means that between 31 to 47 students would not have attended with an earlier starting date.

How then did the other schools make up the enrollment after the initial loss? The theory mentioned in the research studies indicated that with one less exit opportunity, retention would be higher. To determine if this was feasible, we reviewed our enrollment history over the past four years (also see Figure 1). The results were as follows:

Year	Fall	Winter	Spring
1990-91	2337	2180 - 7%	1900 - 19%
1991-92	2910	2735 - 9%	2469 - 15%
1992-93	3418	3029 - 11%	2644 - 23%
1993-94	3270	2817 - 14%	2523 - 23%

As stated above, it does seem plausible that without the exit opportunity between the Winter and Spring Term, there could be a gain in retention.



The two areas researched so far looked at the number of students. The next step was to review the actual number of credits per student. To determine this, we reviewed the results from a question listed on the Term vs. Semester Student Survey. The question asked each student how many credits they would schedule under a semester system. Of the 118 students who responded, there were 1197 expected total credits accounted for under a semester system. When this was compared to their actual term registration, we discovered that they were registered for a total of 887 credits. Therefore, it appeared as though students would enroll for additional credits.

Next, we needed to determine how the credits calculated above converted to annual full-time equivalents. The actual calculations can be found in Appendix D. First, we had to adjust the expected credits due to the constraints of our survey question. One of the survey selections was 15+ credits. We had to make an adjustment for the students who would have taken 18 credits. Since 26% of the students in our survey took more than 10 credits, we used that percentage for our adjustment. The adjustment created an additional 18 credits or a total of 1215 credits. Using the annual attrition rate between Fall and Winter under the term system, we discovered that the annual full-time equivalents for the past year under a semester system would have been 2194. This is in comparison to the actual figures under the term system of 2267. Since only 30% of the student population had exposure to a semester system, the difference listed above was not deemed to be significant by the Committee.

This information did encourage the Committee to investigate a credit for credit conversion to determine the amount of Fall enrollment change which the College could accept without an affect on income (see Appendix E.). As Appendix E. shows, the Semester equivalent enrollment could be reduced by up to 5% before affecting College income. In other words, a 5% reduction in Fall enrollment on a Semester System would result in approximately the same College income when compared to a Term System (with no enrollment decline).

The last area of enrollment research was conducted due to a theory stated by an instructor at the College Forum. The theory was that many three credit students would be upset about a change to semester because they could only get two classes per year instead of three. To check this theory, we randomly selected fifty students enrolled for three credits during the 1993-94 Fall term. We reviewed their enrollment for the next two terms. Only 29% of those students

returned for the Winter Term, while less than half of those 29% enrolled for Spring Term. Thus, there does not seem to be much creditability to the three credit theory.

Staffing and Non-Employee Expenses

The next two categories of review consisted of staffing needs and non-employee expenses. It seemed that the best way to determine this information was to ask all the supervisors through the use of a survey. The survey was designed in the same format as the budget. All areas of cost were listed and the supervisors responsible for the budget were asked to respond. To summarize the results, 97% of the supervisors reported that costs, both staffing and non-employee expenses, would be reduced or remain the same. Many comments indicated that the quality of services would improve due to less processing demands.

In addition to the institutional survey, we gathered some research from Delaware Technical College. They recently conducted a review of teaching loads for other Community Colleges in the tri-state area. The survey showed that the majority of teaching loads under the semester system consisted of 15 credits per semester. Since this was equivalent to our current annual limit of 30 credits, there did not seem to be a need for additional staffing for full-time faculty.

State, Federal and Local Funding

As for State, Federal or Local funding changes, there was no direct link between type of teaching calendar and funding levels. Currently, the funding formula for all three sources do not differentiate between either system.

Continuing Education

Would there be any impact on Continuing Education? Basically, the noncredit division already conducts most of their classes on a semester system. The general consensus in the division is that a change would not impact on noncredit.

Conversion Costs

How expensive would the transformation be and what would need to be changed? Most of the costs of the conversion would be employee time. For example, curriculum revision, computer program changes and consumer information revision are just a few of the necessary changes. Although there is a great deal of change needed, a large amount of money is not needed if sufficient time is allocated for the conversion.

The area of biggest concern was computerization. Without computer program changes, we could not exist. Therefore, we interviewed the manager of computer information systems to see how difficult the changes would be. She indicated that many revisions made over the past few years were made with the possibility of conversion in mind. Therefore, she believes that the conversion would be manageable.

Summary

After careful review, the Financial Issues Committee concluded that a change to a semester system is economically feasible. As the extensive research showed, college income should remain the same or slightly increase and costs should remain the same or slightly decrease. Quality of service should increase due to less processing. All conclusions are based on the current State and Federal Policies. A drastic change in educational funding policies could affect all results under either system of enrollment.

Conclusions & Recommendations

The Term Versus Semester System Taskforce deliberated on the most appropriate calendar system for Reading Area Community College (RACC) for over 1 1/2 years. After reviewing data from several different sources and conducting its own research, the Committee voted 15 to 1 (with 1 abstention) in favor of the Semester System. There were several reasons for the Committee's support of the Semester System. First and foremost, the faculty of RACC indicated a preference for the Semester System; 48% preferred the Semester System while 33% preferred the Term System. When asked which system would benefit students, an even greater percentage of Faculty favored the Semester System. Sixty-three percent (63%) of the Faculty believed that students would benefit more from a Semester System, while only 26% felt that the Term System is more advantageous for students.

From an operational perspective, 97% of department heads who participated in a Cost Analysis Survey believed that both staffing and non-employee expenses would be reduced or remain the same if a change to a Semester System occurred. Furthermore, from an employee perspective, activities (such as registration and academic advisement) and associated supply costs would be reduced by 33%. Many staff also stated that the quality of the services which they offer would correspondingly improve.

The Committee also felt that enrollments would be only moderately affected by a change in calendar system. Based on the experiences of several colleges and universities across the nation, enrollments during the Fall Term would probably drop off slightly (during a change in calendar system) and then return to previous or higher levels of enrollment within the same or next school year. The primary reason for a projected return to previous or even higher enrollments is that Semester Systems, by their nature, create the appearance of better student retention. Very simply, during the academic year, the Semester System has only one point of exit (after the Fall Semester) whereas a Term System has two (after the Fall and Winter Terms). At each exit point, many more students leave than enter during the subsequent term or semester. Consequently, since the Term has more exit points, it "retains" fewer students.

Student preferences for a Term versus a Semester were mixed. Students who transferred from RACC to other institutions (where the semester system was prevalent) favored the Semester System. By contrast, students transferring from other colleges into RACC preferred the Term. Collectively, 45.8% of the respondents to surveys of these two groups favored the Semester, 34.8% preferred the Term, and 19.4% showed no preference.

Of the existing RACC student body which was polled in the Spring Term of the 1994/95 academic year, student preferences were again mixed. Day students appeared to prefer the Semester System while evening students preferred the Term.

The expressed concern over the potential impact of a calendar change on enrollments provided the Committee with the impetus to present several enrollment-related suggestions, in the event of the recommended change to a Semester System.

FIRST - The Committee recommends that the College continue to aggressively market its programs and services despite the many projects related to a calendar change. Research has indicated that those colleges and universities who have neglected their marketing and recruitment efforts tend to experience enrollment declines.

SECOND - Class schedules should be developed which offer a variety of scheduling options to all students. Part-time students and evening students have expressed concern about their ability to accumulate as many credits over an academic year if a change is made to a semester system. The College needs to survey these populations and to look for models at other institutions in order to develop the most attractive, marketable approach to course scheduling.

THIRD - The Committee recommends that the College research and review developmental course sequencing. Community colleges currently operating on a semester system should be consulted in reviewing alternative course sequence plans.

FOURTH - The semester system requires students to pay one-half of their annual tuition each semester rather than one-third as in the term system. To counteract the strain on students' finances due to the accelerated schedule of paying for a whole semester, the Committee recommends that the College review and publicize alternative payment plans such as the three installment plan currently utilized by the College.

FIFTH - The Committee recommends that the College initiate aggressive efforts at student retention. Retention is a College-wide issue which must be fully embraced by every College staff member, especially Faculty who have daily contact with students. Consequently, this effort must be given complete administrative support, both philosophically and financially.

SIXTH - The Committee recommends that a separate taskforce be developed to supervise the conversion from a Term to a Semester system. The process itself will probably take one and one-half to two years and will require the dedication of several highly competent and specialized College employees.

References

Coleman, D., Bolte, J. R., & Franklin, L. (1984). Academic calendar change impact on enrollment patterns and instructional outcomes. Research in Higher Education, 20, 155 - 166.

College of the Redwoods (1976). Calendar study committee final report. Eureka, CA: College of the Redwoods. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 134 259).

Fowler, F. J. (1990). Survey research methods. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications.

Puyear, D. (1989). Semesters, enrollment, and retention: The effect of converting from quarters to semesters on enrollment and retention in the Virginia Community College System. Richmond: Virginia State Department of Community Colleges. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 308 918).

APPENDIX A: STUDENT SERVICES SURVEY

Reading Area Community College is currently conducting research on its academic calendar, that is, the way courses are scheduled during the academic year. The purpose of this research is to determine if the current academic calendar in use at RACC best serves the needs of the students as well as the college.

Please review the following information to obtain a better understanding of the differences between RACC's current academic calendar (Term calendar) and the academic calendar which is used by many other colleges and universities (semester calendar). Please contribute to this research by answering all of the questions as indicated.

TERM CALENDAR	SEMESTER CALENDAR
An academic year which is divided into three 10-week terms	An academic year which is divided into two 15-week semesters
An academic year which begins in late September and ends in mid June	An academic year which begins in late August and ends in mid May
Classes meet for one hour and 20 min. on a MWF schedule and two hours on a TT schedule. Evening classes meet for two hours two times per week.	Classes meet for about 50- 55 min. on a MWF schedule and one hour and 15 min on a TT schedule. Evening classes meet one evening per week for 2 1/2 hours or two evenings for 1 hr. 15 min. each.
Full time students carry 8 - 12 credits per term for three terms (24-36 credits per year, not including summer).	Full time students carry 12 - 18 credits per semester for two semesters (24- 36 credits per year, not including summer)

Both the Term calendar and the Semester calendar offer opportunities for a college to offer other length modules in addition to the main system in order to best meet the needs of the students and the community.

DIRECTIONS

Please place your social security number at the top of your answer sheet and answer all of the following questions by blackening in the correct spaces on your answer sheet using a #2 pencil.

For questions 1 - 6, indicate which items best describe you.

1. A. Full time student (8 or more credits per term)
   B. Part time stuent (less than 8 credits per term)

2. A. Daytime student
   B. Evening student

3. A. Have taken or are currently taking a Saturday class
   B. Have never taken a Saturday class

4. A. intending to transfer to another college after leaving RACC
   B. not intending to transfer to another college

5. A. have attended a college on a semester calendar before RACC
   B. have never attended a college on a semester calendar

6. A. have completed at least 30 college credits
   B. have competed less than 30 credits

Please indicate your preferece in each of the following questions by marking the appropriate choice on your answer sheet.

7. An Academic Year that
   A. begins in late August or early September and ends in early May.
   B. begins in late September and ends in mid June.
   C. No preference

8. A full time minimum courseload of
   A. 8 - 12 credits for each of three ten-week terms.
   B. 12 - 18 credits for each of two fifteen-week semesters.
   C. No preference

9. Opportunities for summer employment or vacations during a summer break
   A. which begins in early May and ends in late August.
   B. which begins in mid June and ends in late September.
   C. No preference

10. Monday-Wednesday-Friday day classes which meet
   A. for one hour and twenty minutes each for ten weeks.
   B. for fifty minutes each for fifteen weeks.
   C. No preference

11. Tuesday-Thursday day classes which meet
   A. for two hours each for ten weeks.
   B. for one hour and twenty minutes each for fifteen weeks.
   C. No preference

12. Evening classes which meet
   A. for two hours, two nights a week, for ten weeks.
   B. for three hours, one night a week, for fifteen weeks.
   C. No preference

13. Choosing class schedules, registering, and paying tuition
   A. three times during the academic year.
   B. two times during the academic year.
   C. No preference

14. A pattern of breaks within the academic year which consists of
   A. Christmas through late January and one week in the spring.
   B. the second week in December to the first week in January and one week in the spring.
   C. No preference

15. Learning 40 hours of course material (the equivalent of a 3-credit course)
    A. in ten weeks
    B. in fifteen weeks
    C. No preference

16. An academic year which consists of
    A. three ten-week terms
    B. two fifteen-week semesters
    C. No preference

For questions 17 - 26 below, choose one of the following responses based on which you think would be in your best interest as a student:

A. a fifteen week class schedule which runs two times a year
B. a ten week class schedule which runs three times a year
C. no preference
D. I don't know

17. to add a class or register late

18. to study, write papers, or meet with a tutor

19. to rebound academically after an unsuccessful first test or paper

20. coverage of course material

21. for library research

22. to catch up from missed classes

23. for involvement in college activities

24. to meet with your instructor

25. demands on personal life

26. to complete more courses over the academic year

27. In your opinion, would you recommend that RACC adopt a Semester System or continue to operate under a Term System?
    A. Term System B. Semester System

28. If RACC adopted a semester system (see description on page one) approximately how many credits would you schedule per semester?
    A. 3 credits C. 9 credits E. 15 or more credits
    B. 6 credits D. 12 credits

Please feel free to write any additional comments you may have in the whits space to the left. Thank You

APPENDIX B: EMPLOYEE SURVEY
TERM VERSUS SEMESTER QUESTIONNAIRE

Please give *one response unless otherwise stated and record your answer on the* special answer card provided. Use only a number 2 pencil. Thank you.

1. Please indicate your job classification.
   a. Classified
   b. Paraprofessional
   c. Faculty
   d. Coordinator
   e. Director
   f. Administrator

2. Are you a full-time or part-time employee?
   a. Full-time b. Part-time

3. Please identify your general departmental area.
   a. Academic Affairs (primarily the credit division)
   b. Academic Affairs (primarily non-credit)
   c. Student Services
   d. Business Services

Please consider questions 4 - 17 in terms of which calendar system you think would be more beneficial <u>for students</u>.

4. For academic advisement
   a. Term System b. Semester System c. No difference d. Don't know

5. For adding or dropping a course or registering late
   a. Term System b. Semester System c. No difference d. Don't know

6. For tuition payment schedules
   a. Term System b. Semester System c. No difference d. Don't know

7. For library research
   a. Term System b. Semester System c. No difference d. Don't know

8. For reading, studying, and completing assignments
   a. Term System b. Semester System c. No difference d. Don't know

9. For tutorial assistance
   a. Term System b. Semester System c. No difference d. Don't know

10. For student/instructor meetings
    a. Term System b. Semester System c. No difference d. Don't know

11. For coverage of course material
    a. Term System b. Semester System c. No difference d. Don't know

12. For catching up from missed classes
    a. Term System b. Semester System c. No difference d. Don't know

13. For recovering academically after an unsuccessful first test or paper
    a. Term System b. Semester System c. No difference d. Don't know

14. For completing more courses over the academic year
    a. Term System b. Semester System c. No difference d. Don't know

15. For a full-time study load
    a. Term System b. Semester System c. No difference d. Don't know

16. For a part-time study load
    a. Term System b. Semester System c. No difference d. Don't know

17. For involvement in college activities
    a. Term System b. Semester System c. No difference d. Don't know

18. For summer employment or employment after graduation
    a. Term System b. Semester System c. No difference d. Don't know

19. Overall, which system do you believe would benefit students more? (Bear in mind that other length modules could be offered with both systems.)
    a. Term System b. Semester System c. No difference d. Don't know

20. In your opinion, which calendar system would more favorably influence the enrollment of credit students?
    a. Term System b. Semester System c. No difference d. Don't know

21. In your opinion, which calendar system would more favorably impact on the retention of credit students?
    a. A Term Calendar as the main system (our current calendar) with options to offer other length modules
    b. A Semester Calendar with options to offer other length modules
    c. No difference
    d. Not sure

22. Which calendar system would be more beneficial to you in your current position as an employee of the College?
    a. A Term Calendar as the main system (our current calendar) with options to offer other length modules
    b. A Semester Calendar with options to offer other length modules
    c. No difference
    d. Not sure

23. Overall, which calendar system do you prefer?
    a. A Term Calendar as the main system (our current calendar) with options to offer other length modules.
    b. A Semester Calendar with options to offer other length modules.
    c. Not sure.
    d. It doesn't matter to me.

24. If the College chose to change to a semester system, how long a period should be given so as to best accomplish this change?
    a. 6 months or less c. About two years
    b. About one year d. Three years or more

25. Are there variations of the semester system (other than what was described on the cover page of this survey) that RACC should be considering? If you know of one which you feel we should investigate, please describe in the space on the reverse side of the answer sheet.

26. Please feel free to make any other comments on the reverse side of the answer sheet.

THANK YOU for completing this survey; please return it to Kim Pham in the Institutional Research Office, Room 114.

To: Faculty Members, All Full-Timers and Spring Part-Timers
From: Academic Issues Group of Term vs. Semester Committee
(Bridget Bauer, Ernest Ebert, Gael Grossman, Jane Joering, Sandy Kern, Shelley Lawler, Judy Peterson, Bruce Stanley, Linda Waterbury)
Date: 5/2/94

Re: **Questionnaire to Faculty on Academic Impact of Term-or-Semester Decision**

Our group is trying to find out how a term-or-semester decision would affect RACC <u>academically</u>, hence this questionnaire. Your answers will also help us direct and focus our work over the next few months. We appreciate and need your input. Please try to turn this in to Bruce Stanley or Shelley Lawlor on or before June 17th. Our thanks to you!

1. **Have you ever taught in a college with a semester system?**
Please circle: Yes No

2. **What do you see as <u>crucial areas of academic concern</u> in any decision to stay with the term or go with a semester system? CHECK (√) WHAT YOU CONSIDER TO BE THE TOP SEVEN (7) AREAS:**

curricula: impact on
__ whole programs
__ individual courses
__ registration (pre- and open-, advisement, etc.)
__ basic-skills development
__ library use
__ testing center use
__ course transfer (acceptance of RACC courses)
__ act of transferring (ease of process)
__ faculty teaching load
student course load: impact on
__ students receiving financial aid (where "full-time" requires 8 credits a term or 12 credits a semester)
__ students graduating in two years (where "full-time" requires 10-12 cr. a term or 15-18 cr. a semester)
__ students going part-time only
__ students going night-time only (taking up to 4 courses a term [two 120-minute classes per night] or 6 courses a semester [three 80-minute classes per night])
__ adjuncts
__ scheduling
__ academic quality

Do you have other areas of concern not among those listed above?

__ _____

__ _____

__ _____

(More questions on the back.)--->

2. In your opinion, what are the **TERM** system's advantages?

3. In your opinion, what are the **TERM** system's disadvantages?

(For questions 4 & 5, assume a semester system that has been settled into. The issues of a changeover period itself will be addressed in question 6.)

4. In your opinion, what are the **SEMESTER** system's advantages?

5. In your opinion, what are the **SEMESTER** system's disadvantages?

6. What impact would a changeover to the semester system have on you as a faculty member (teaching load, advising, etc.)?

7. What major changes in the courses you teach would have to be made to accommodate a semester system?

8. Please give your overall opinion: are you in favor of remaining with a term system or changing to a semester system?

THANK YOU! PLEASE RETURN TO BRUCE STANLEY OR SHELLEY LAWLOR BY JUNE 17TH.

APPENDIX D.
TERM VERSUS SEMESTER SYSTEM STUDENT CREDITS ESTIMATE
Fiscal Years 1992/92, 1993/94, 1994/95)

From the Term Versus Semester Student Survey, 118 students actually scheduled 887 credits in the Fall Term, 1994. These same students scheduled 887 credits in the Fall, 1995. Using the returning student percentages from three years of enrollments, the following statistics estimate the number of credits which would have been taken using either the the Term or Semester System.

	CREDITS		Adjustment Factor
1992/93	Term	Semester	
Fall Smpl	887.0	1215.0	100.0% (plus 18 credits adjustment)
Winter Proj	791.2	1083.8	89.2% Return/new/readmit rate
Spring Proj	704.2		89.0% Return/new/readmit rate
	2382.4	2298.8	

	CREDITS		Decline & Credit Retention Rates
1993/94	Term	Semester	
Fall Smpl	887.0	1215.0	100.0% (plus 18 credits adjustment)
Winter Proj	769.0	1053.4	86.7% Return/new/readmit rate
Spring Proj	692.9		90.1% Return/new/readmit rate
	2348.9	2268.4	

	CREDITS		Decline & Credit Retention Rates
1994/95	Term	Semester	
Fall Smpl	887.0	1215.0	100.0% (plus 18 credits adjustment)
Winter Proj	714.9	979.3	80.6% Return/new/readmit rate
Spring Proj	665.6		93.1% Return/new/readmit rate
	2267.5	2194.3	

** Adjustment Factor - 23 Students suggested that they would take 15+ credits if the College would change to a Semester System. In the Fall, 1995, 8 of 31 students took more than 10 credits, the equivalent of 15 credits in a Semester System. Therefore, 8/31 of 23 = .258 X 23 = 5.9 or 6 students would have taken more than 15 credits. Since the typical load of students taking more than 15 credits in a Semester System is 18 credits, we can estimate that 6 students will take 3 more credits per Semester; this adds another 18 credits to the Semester Total. Thus, an additional 18 credits were added to all three years of enrollment above.

APPENDIX E.
TERM VERSUS SEMESTER SYSTEM STUDENT CREDITS ESTIMATE
Fiscal Years 1992/92, 1993/94, 1994/95)

From the Term Versus Semester Student Survey, 118 students actually scheduled 887 credits in the Fall Term, 1994. These same students would take 1.5 times as many credits in a Semester System, the same factor which is used to convert all term credits to semester credits. Using the returning student credits percentages from 3 years of Enrollments, the following estimates the annual number of credits taken in both calendar systems, given a specific Fall Semester Decline Rate of: 5.0%

1992/93	CREDITS Term	Semester	Decline & Credit Retention Rates
Fall Smpl	887.0	1264.0	5.0% Decline with Semester
Winter Proj	791.2	1127.5	89.2% "Retained" credit rates
Spring Proj	704.2		89.0% "Retained" credit rates
	2382.4	2391.4	

1993/94	CREDITS Term	Semester	Decline & Credit Retention Rates
Fall Smpl	887.0	1264.0	5.0% Decline with Semester
Winter Proj	769.0	1095.9	86.7% "Retained" credit rates
Spring Proj	692.9		90.1% "Retained" credit rates
	2348.9	2359.8	

1994/95	CREDITS Term	Semester	Decline & Credit Retention Rates
Fall Smpl	887.0	1264.0	5.0% Decline with Semester
Winter Proj	714.9	1018.8	80.6% "Retained" credit rates
Spring Proj	665.6		93.1% "Retained" credit rates
	2267.5	2282.7	

Decline Percentage	5.0%
Retain Percentage	95.0%

EMPLOYEE SURVEY

Faculty Responses Only

	% Term	% Sem
Academic Advisement	13	70
Drop/Add/Late Registration	22	59
Tuition Payment Schedules	24	35
Library Research	7	76
Reading/Studying/Assignments	15	59
Tutorial Assistance	11	65
Student/Instructor Meetings	9	43
Coverage of Course Material	4	67
Catching Up on a Missed Class	9	72
Stu. Recovery after Bad Test	11	72
Completing More Courses/Year	50	9
For a Full-Time Study Load	48	24
For a Part-Time Study Load	50	20
Involvement/College Activities	4	41
Summer / Graduate Employment	7	76
Favorably Influence Enrollment	40	29
Overall Benefit to Students	26	63
Better for Retention	28	48
Better for Your Position	38	36
Which do You Prefer?	33	48

41 Full-Time and 5 Part-Time Faculty Responded